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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUP #0837/01 2351429
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 221429Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3310
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0439

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUDAPEST 000837

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JLAMORE; PASS TO NSC ADAM STERLING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/22/2013
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [OSCE](#) [UN](#) [GG](#) [RS](#) [HU](#)
SUBJECT: TF001 HUNGARY - WHERE THEY STAND ON
RUSSIA-GEORGIA CRISIS

REF: A. STATE 89769
[1](#)B. BUDAPEST 0821 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Jeffrey Levine, reasons 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite similarities to the 1956 Soviet invasion, the Hungarian Government has been reluctant to go further in its criticism of Russia than the EU-NATO consensus statements supporting Georgia. With the Prime Minister notably silent on the issue, President Solyom finally stepped forward on August 21 during a 40th anniversary commemoration of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, drawing a direct connection between the Russian-led invasion of that country to the current Russian intervention in Georgia. Opposition FIDESZ President Viktor Orban and Free Democrat SzDSz Parliamentary Matyas Eorsi - recently back from a trip to Georgia - have been more outspoken in response to the aggression. In response to Orban's comments, the Russian Ambassador to Hungary has sharply rebuked him in the press, but the crisis has fallen off the front page of most Hungarian dailies. Post remains engaged with the Hungarian Government and public on the issue through official government contact as well as media outreach. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) While GOH representatives believe they have been "very firm" on Hungary's position (reftel B) vis-a-vis the crisis, publicly, government officials have been lukewarm at best in their response - only reiterating NATO/EU statements. The exception was President Solyom's comments on August 21 during a commemoration of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, attended by the Ambassador. Solyom drew a "worrying" parallel between that event and the current crisis, calling on Russia to withdraw its troops and implement the truce without delay.

[1](#)3. (C) In contrast to official government statements, FIDESZ President Viktor Orban has been outspoken in his criticism of the Russian action in Georgia, as well as the current Hungarian Government leaders, calling on Prime Minister Gyurcsany and the Government to reassess "their special track" (become firmer in their public statements) as Hungary cannot obstruct EU and NATO united measures. In comments on August 17, and in a letter to the Presidents of Georgia, Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states on August 21, Orban called on Russia to withdraw immediately. Orban also emphasized that Georgia and Ukraine "must be allowed to join NATO as soon as possible." In response to Orban's August 17 statement, the Russian Ambassador to Hungary, Igor Savolsky, stated Orban is "in solidarity with the (war criminal) Georgian President, and thus in an indirect way, has blood on his hands - my fellow citizens' blood." Responding to Orban's letter, Savolsky commented that "there is not one word of truth...influential EU countries listen to common sense and not the FIDESZ President as to whether to allow a country led by a reckless President to join the Atlantic alliance."

¶4. (C) As the only prominent Hungarian public figure to visit Georgia since the crisis began, SzDSz MP Matyas Eorsi provided his assessment in a press conference upon returning to Budapest on August 21. Eorsi stated that he was stopped several times on his way out of Gori by Russian troops. He noted that there was virtually no sign of a Russian withdrawal, in fact, "most of the military convoys were headed in the wrong direction...and one of Russia's goals appears to be the economic destruction of Georgia." The damage to buildings and infrastructure in Gori "was tremendous," with two-thirds of Gori's 45,000 residents having left the city and the living conditions in the refugee camps were "extremely difficult." Eorsi drew direct parallels to the Russian invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Prague in 1968, calling on "the free world to unite in forcing Russia to change its ways and to protect countries like Georgia." While noting that Hungary was in no position to take "radical steps" against Russia in response to the conflict, he stated that the statements of the GOH and FIDESZ President Orban "have been appropriate."

¶5. (C) Embassy engagement with the Hungarians on the Russia-Georgia conflict extends beyond official contacts cited in reftel A. Our Public Affairs Office arranged for NATO Ambassador Volker to provide comments (in Hungarian) to Hungary's TV-1 via a video link on August 18, and a similar interview with DAS Bryza is scheduled for early in the week of August 25. The largest Hungarian daily, Nepszabadsag, will carry the Washington-generated op-ed on the crisis in their August 23 weekend edition under the Ambassador's signature. Additionally, Post will take advantage of the

CODEL Lugar visit on August 29-30 to reinforce our message to the Hungarians to be more vocal on the Georgia-Russia conflict.
Foley